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Left The 65,000-tonne aircraft carrier Leonid Brezhnev is currently being fitted-out at Nikolayev and a second of the class is being built. Right The SA-X-12B Giant complements the SA-12A Gladiator Sam. The Giant is a WOkm-range, low-to-high altitude missile

remain primarily a land-based
force. The 65,000-tonne
conventional-layout aircraft
carrier Leonid Brezhnev was
launched in December 1985
from Nikolayev on the Black
Sea, and is still fitting out.
The flight-deck configuration
of this 300m-long carrier has
yet to be confirmed, and
aircraft for its air wing are
under development at Saki
AB, also near the Black Sea.
At Saki a 295m flight-deck
outline has been laid out,
complete with arresting gear
and crash barricades and two
catapults, one being tested
and one under development.
Two ski-jump ramps are also
in use and several aircraft,
including Flanker and
Fulcrum (and Flight under-

stands, Flogger and Frogfoot)
have been operated from the
dummy deck. All of these
aircraft might be converted
for carrier use, and it is
possible that a new dedicated
naval fighter might be built as
a result of experience gained
from the trials. The carrier's
aircraft complement will
probably include at least 45
advanced Stovl aircraft.

The land-based Naval
Aviation has become the first
service to operate the Tu-26
Backfire C (with wedge-type
air intakes similar to those of
the MiG-25 Foxbat), with a
new Regiment attached to the
Black Sea Fleet.

In early 1986 this force also
received a squadron of Su-24
Fencer E, marking the initial

deployment of Fencer in
Naval Aviation. The latest
model, Fencer E, is a maritime
recce/strike variant, and the
Baltic deployment brings the
total number of Fencers now
in service to more than 800
aircraft.
The Soviet Union is also
spending about $1 billion a
year on laser weapons
research. Most of this takes
place at Sary-Shagan Missile
Test Centre, where anti-
ballistic missile (ABM) test-
ing is also conducted. The
Soviet work is exploring three
types of laser; gas dynamic,
electric discharge, and
chemical, all of which
have achieved "impressive"
power output, says the DoD.
The USSR may also be

exploring the potential of
visible and very-short-wave-
length lasers, and investigat-
ing excimer, free-electron,
and x-ray lasers. It has been
developing argon-ion lasers.
The DoD estimates that the
USSR could not field an
operational ground-based
ABM laser until the late 1990s
and, if their R&D is success-
ful, an operational space-
based laser until early the
next century, but high-
energy air defence lasers are
likely to be deployed on the
ground in the early 1990s
and at sea in the mid-1990s.
A prototype space-based
particle-beam weapon capable
of disrupting the electronics
of satellites might be tested in
the 1990s.

Below Sovremennyy-class destroyers have recently used laser-rangers to irradiate maritime patrol aircraft taking close-up pictures like this one, take off Japan. The laser sight used is the small grey box mounted just forward of the bridge. Even relatively low-power laser rangefinders can cause serio eye damage and temporary or permanent blindness

10 FLIGHT INTERNATIONAL, 4 April 1987